Alternative Financing Mechanisms for Multifunctional Agriculture in 'Public Open Space'

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Abstract— **In spite of a Flemish planning policy that strived the last decennia at conserving the city (or urban areas) and countryside both as functionally and morphologically separable entities and as antipoles, it is observed that due to an unrestrained suburbanisation city and countryside become increasingly interwoven in Flanders. People still reproduce space in these two spatial categories but society and governments are no longer capable in producing this symbolic space in a physical and social way. It is clear that a top-down imposed, uniformising planning discourse is not able to get a grip on present urbanising processes and therefore alternative story-lines are needed.**

An alternative story line of 'open space as public space', points at the societal importance of public space and could be useful in understanding the challenges in present network society. In a context in which almost the entire Flemish space is 'urban', open-space-fragments seem to be able to fulfil a role as public space and have to become structuring spatial elements for further urbanisation. Three success factors in (designing) planning the open space seem to have the potential to be a lot more essential to the spatial visioning on open space fragments/rural areas than the current functional delineation of parts of the natural and agricultural structure.

At the same time it is clear that multifunctional agriculture (MFA), meeting a broad spectrum of societal demands, is strongly related to the critical success factors for a good functioning of 'public open space', not on the reference scale of urban public space but on that of the collective open space at the regional level. A financing construction, which contains three possible alternative financing mechanisms for collective services, has a lot of potential in reinforcing the 'public open space'. A proactive and offensive role of governments seems crucial in setting up this financing construction.

Keywords— **public open space, alternative financing, multifunctional agriculture**

I. INTRODUCTION

Similar to the Dutch spatial context, Flanders – the northern part of Belgium – is very densely urbanised. Approximately 70 percent of the Flemish population resides in an urban complex – i.e. an area determined by suburbanisation from and commuting to one of the nine Flemish urban agglomerations or the capital of Brussels. Only 10 % of the population lives in urban centres, the majority in suburban environments. However, 76 % of Flanders still remains open, varying from vast and fairly open rural areas at the fringes of Flanders to a mosaic of fragments of open space in the more urbanised centre in between the cities of Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent. (Cabus, 2001; Kesteloot, 2003) One could almost say that the notion of 'network urbanity' was invented with the Flemish spatial context in mind. At the same time, this observation makes Flanders' spatial structure and, in particular, its spatial planning policy towards its characteristic open space fragments as the remaining rural areas an interesting subject of research as they have evolved in a sort of laboratory condition of network urbanity…

The findings of Leinfelder (2007) on the historical evolution of the Flemish spatial planning policy for the countryside are taken as a starting point for this paper. He carefully reconstructed the conceptual story line about the countryside and the institutionalisation of this story line for three decisive moments: the design of the zoning plans in the period 1960-1980, the development of the strategic Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders in the period 1980-2000 and the delineation of parts of the natural and agricultural structure since 2000 as part of the implementation of the structure plan. All relevant (interim) studies and visionary and political documents at national and regional (Flemish) level were analysed chronologically on their story line. The institutionalisation of discourses was approached

through the analysis of urbanistic rules and/or explanatory documents concerning these rules.

The research illustrates that this period of 45 years has been constantly dominated by a discourse in Flemish planning policy that considers city and countryside – urban areas and countryside – as functionally and morphologically separable entities and as antipoles. The dominance of this planning discourse is not unique for Flemish planning policy. Great Britain's policy for instance is dictated by a strong conservative public opinion about the countryside, ranging from aristocrats obsessed by fox hunting to NIMBY-adepts campaigning against every new development close by. This conservatism is also solidly institutionalised in legislation such as the Agriculture Act and the Town and Country Planning Act. And almost since time immemorial, the Dutch planning policy strives for a similar 'planning doctrine', indirectly pursuing the conservation of the countryside by urban densification or 'intension' – as the opposite of urban extension. (Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994; Van der Valk, 2002) At a European level, the findings of the RURBAN knowledge exchange project express a strong cultural determination in the perception of the relation between city and countryside. (Overbeek, 2006) The comparable, antipole perception in Flanders, Great Britain and the Netherlands seems typical for most North-West European countries with a rural tradition that focuses on agriculture and/or nature. Countryside is highly appreciated as a space for production and consumption and cities and urban pressure are negatively perceived. Oppositely, the Mediterranean rural tradition approaches the countryside rather negatively, so cities and urbanisation are perceived quite positively because of stimulating economic development.

This observation on the dominance of a planning discourse about the countryside in Flanders explains the further outline of this paper. The second chapter will introduce and elaborate on an alternative and challenging concept for the planning of open space in the Flemish context or, more generally, in urbanised and still urbanising contexts, namely a planning concept that considers open space fragments in an urbanising context as a public/collective/shared space. As this planning concept also broadens the perspectives for multifunctional agriculture, alternative financing mechanisms that involve private users in the development and management of this 'public open space' are explored theoretically in the third chapter.

II. AN ALTERNATIVE STORY LINE FOR THE PLANNING OF OPEN SPACE/RURAL AREAS: OPEN SPACE AS PUBLIC SPACE

After 40 years, the validity of the story line of the dominant planning discourse on cities and countryside as antipoles is under pressure. Where people symbolically still reproduce space in these two spatial categories, society and government are no longer capable in producing this symbolic space also in a physical and social way. There is no longer a solid physical, social or cultural repertory that allows to link functions and activities one-to-one to the predicates 'urban' and 'rural'. The top-down imposed, uniformising planning discourse no longer makes sense. In an urbanising (Flemish) spatial context, it is time to evaluate the potential of alternative story lines on the spatial development of open space/the countryside in relation to urbanity. One of them is 'open space as public space'.

A. Societal context of 'open space as public space'

The alternative story line of 'open space as public space' is inspired by one of the main socio-cultural challenges in contemporary network society: learning to cope with the other, with diversity and differences. This pluralistic ambition, this positive tolerance, is a more realistic perspective than the feverish search for the utopian ideal of 'community'. (see Lofland, 1998 and Sandercock, 1998) Such an ambition does not even involve that individuals or societal groups really meet … observing the other will often suffice to gain knowledge about other one's uses and it is this knowledge that is essential for the creation of trust and the essential social capital in society. (Madanipour, 2003)

In a spatial context, 'public space' is the ultimate medium to meet this socio-cultural challenge, to confront the one with the other. As a consequence, it is and will stay one of the main tasks for spatial planning to create public space that is accessible and useful to a varied group of people so confrontation can take place. The current academic debate about the societal importance of public space, however, is predominantly

focused on urban public space. In a context in which almost the entire Flemish space is 'urban', also open space fragments seem to be able to fulfil a role as public space. A first argument pro is the growing diversity in users of open space and the meanings they give to this open space. A large group of users nostalgically glorifies the fragments of open space as the lost paradise, characterised by features such as space, quietness and darkness that seem to be lost in network society. For these users, the countryside has become a refuge from modernity and is defended against every thinkable development. At the same time, a part of the population, especially the younger generation looking for entertainment, thinks of space, quietness and darkness as boring. They want open space as a green setting for experiences and fun and consume the countryside as an extension of the urban public space that already fell victim to entertainment. These extremes illustrate that, also in the countryside, network society has resulted in social fragmentation. Mutual understanding of each other's activities, social relationships and mobilising capacity based on shared values and needs have become scarce what, also in the open space, gives rise to mutual intolerance. In other words, neither rural society can escape from the challenge to restore and to strengthen the social capital. (Amdam, 2006) Finally, open space fragments in an urbanising society increasingly become morphological equivalents of the unbuilt public space within cities. However, where the urban public space has been kept free as a concept in a solid vision on the functioning of a city, the enclaves of open space are often accidental and thus unstructured remains after urbanisation. Anyhow, the conception and development of both have to be well thought-out to fulfil their public role in society. Gallent et al. (2004) and Halfacree (2004), for instance, emphasise the uniqueness and non-transitory character of these open space fragments because of their recreational, aesthetic and identifying qualities that contribute to the living environment of the urban dweller.

The alternative story line of 'open space as public space' does not at all imply an underestimation nor a substitution of the existing urban public space. It assumes additional public space and thus, as a consequence, some kind of relief to the extremely occupied traditional public space. Finally, the euphony of 'public open space' varnishes over its shortcomings as it ignores the most important fact that it can never become a public space in the sense that it would be a public good, owned by the state and at the service of everyone. Also in future the majority of the open space will be owned by private owners who are confronted with the fact that their (activities in) open space (are) is 'consumed' by a growing number of users. They will, to a smaller or larger extent, give access to this open space and/or tolerate other users. In this context, it seems more appropriate to use notions such as 'collective space' and 'shared space'.

B. Planning concepts of 'open space as public space'

Open space fragments are no longer residual spaces but become structuring spatial elements for further urbanisation. A drastic switch in the overall perception of urban spatial development takes place: from a quite autonomously growing city that gradually squanders the countryside towards a consciously designed urban agglomeration in which open space is considered as a basic ingredient. Based on a research project looking for the critical success factors in the design of green public spaces in large urban agglomerations all over the world – such as for instance Central Park in New York – Tummers & Tummers-Zuurmond (1997) determine three elements that seem to have the potential to be a lot more essential to the spatial visioning on open space fragments/rural areas in a (Flemish) urbanising spatial context than the current functional and technically inspired delineation of parts of the natural and agricultural structure.

The first success factor includes the presence of a space with a size that is proportional to the surrounding urban tissue. Moreover, its continuity in time has to be guaranteed politically as well as socially. Translated to the planning and design of public open space in an urbanising context, the success factor can be applied at different scales. Typical radial urbanisation along connection roads between villages results in open space fragments with a rather proportional size in relation to the urbanised environment. Smaller fragment are often in proportion to smaller communities nearby; one or a few agricultural parcels are in proportion to spread out or linear residential development. At a national scale, the Green Heart in the Netherlands operates as an open

space for the city dwellers in the surrounding cities of the Randstad.

The permanent status of the open space fragment is very contextual. In some fragments, for instance in river beds, it is physically impossible to build so their continuity in time is almost automatically assured. The societal and cultural value of castle parks, important natural areas or protected landscapes is so high that the risk of being built in is quite small. The economic, ecological or cultural value of the largest number of open space fragments however – especially those in agricultural use – is not enough to guarantee the openness over time. In these cases, the permanency has to be created in facts, for example through their public role in urbanising society, or artificially in zoning plans.

The second success factor implies the design of a built fringe around the open space fragment. The urban functions and activities in this fringe really or visually make use of the open space and are, in the long term, an important guarantee for the conservation of the open space. In a (Flemish) urbanising context, the element of a built fringe is already available in the form of residential and other developments in the urban fringe or in the network urbanity of smaller villages and communities, ribbon and spread development. What seems to be missing however, is the functional and/or visual orientation of the buildings towards the open space. This observations leads to recommendations concerning the design of the contact area between the open space and the built fringe. Important elements are of course 'windows' or 'vistas' that facilitate the view from the private space in the built fringe to the public open space and vice versa. But also the contact area could be explicitly 'designed' as a sort of common ground for activities that attract both farmers and dwellers: allotment gardens, school gardens, composting grounds, …

The third and final success factor to make an open space a real public space is the location of a special building at a peripheral position that unifies the public open space and the built fringe. The (activity in the) building attracts people from the fringe and beyond and stimulates the interested ones to further explore the open space. Where the location of a bank or a playground in a public square determines the latter's functional possibilities, similar dynamics can be expected in open space of the insertion of recreational services – a children's farm or a forest – sport infrastructure – a golf court – cultural activities – an open air museum – or, at a very detailed scale, a bench in the periphery of some parcels in agricultural use. The most important challenge is to tune the attractiveness of the new element to the degree of public character wanted for the open space fragment involved.

III. ALTERNATIVE FINANCING MECHANISMS FOR MULTIFUNCTIONAL AGRICULTURE

A. Multifunctional agriculture as a necessary condition for 'public open space' at a regional scale

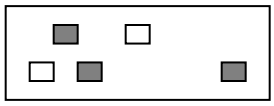
The evolution from a specialised and more monofunctional form of agriculture towards more multifunctional agriculture (MFA), meeting a spectrum of societal demands, seems to be a very logical transition in the alternative story line of 'open space as public space'. Moreover, 'open space' is not just an exclusive by-product of MFA. It eventually becomes a 'collective space' with 'shared meanings' through the interaction of these diverse MFA activities on the one hand and the activities of other and diverse societal groups in open space on the other hand.

The recent attention for MFA is part of a broad discussion on the contribution of agriculture to a sustainable rural development and on its relation with society. The first definitions (e.g. the definition by the OECD in 1998) conceptualise MFA almost exclusively in economic terms. More recent definitions focus more on the potential of public and private markets in new rural services to respond to new societal demands with regard to agriculture. This paper emphasises the contribution of MFA to the production of pure collective (e.g. cultural inheritance and social cohesion) and quasi collective goods (e.g. landscape and nature) for two reasons. First, these collective goods are strongly linked with the production of symbolic space – and thus with the production of 'public open space'. Secondly, the new rural or 'green' services in agriculture are hardly marketable and therefore deserve special attention, but, since government is however no longer capable of remunerating for these 'green' services, alternative financing mechanisms are really needed.

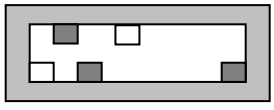
In order to understand the relation between MFA and the success factors for a good functioning of 'public open space', as described in 3.3, it is necessary to extend the micro scale of reference of the (urban) public space to the regional scale of the open space. A 'good functioning' of public open space at such a scale means that the characteristics – or the identity as a holistic container of these characteristics – of a certain region can be experienced 'freely'. In order to achieve this, Herngreen (2002) not only pleads for a strategic, coherent and integrated vision on some 7 (autonomous) transformations with a spatial impact (traffic, housing, nature, agriculture, water management, recreation and economic activities), but also stresses the importance of 'space' for both collective/shared and individual meanings as an 8th transformation in space. The first type of meanings mentioned can take the form of narratives in society with respect to symbols and/or recognisable landscapes; the individual meanings on the other hand often refer to informal or undetermined aspects of space. Good to know is that Herngreen emphasises that fine-meshed public networks and accessible meeting places are essential for experiencing both shared and individual meanings in open space.

Combining the three critical success factors for conceiving a 'public open space' with Herngreen's principles for the eight transformations in open space, one cannot but conclude that MFA plays an important role in the expression of 'public open space' at a regional scale.

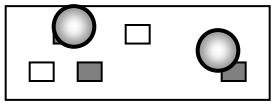
With respect to the first success factor, it is obvious that MFA has a positive impact on economic, ecological and/or cultural values. These values in open space, added amongst others by MFA, clearly contribute to the public role and the permanent status of the open space considered. Some of the collective goods linked to MFA – e.g. cultural heritage and landscape – contribute to the social construction of shared identities (dark grey) while other services – e.g. accessibility or nature management – allow individuals to construct their own meanings (white) in open space.



The second success factor deals with the interrelation between the 'public open space' and the built fringe. In the contact area between both (grey), the opportunities for MFA are quite different than those in the central zone (white) of the open space. In the contact area multifunctional activities prevail that contribute to a functional and/or a visual relation between the open space and the built fringe – e.g. the direct selling of quality products or the management of valuable landscapes. In the central zone, where the visual and functional relation is weaker, accessibility and other collective goods, such as quietness and darkness, become more important.



The presence of a peripheral attractor within the 'public' space is a third success factor. Translated to a regional scale, one can think of a few 'hot spots' with MFA-activities of high recreational, cultural and/or ecological value that, to a high degree, contribute to the experience of 'public' space.



Summarised, it is obvious that MFA, which is characterised by horizontal networks with other activities in open space, has more opportunities in performing the three success factors of 'public open space' than a more monofunctional and vertically integrated form of agriculture. However, since the regional conditions for developing MFA are not always favourable and remuneration systems for (quasi-)collective services are often lacking, it is clear that a trajectory towards MFA is definitely not the easiest way. Therefore, the next chapters of this paper focus on the operational aspects of building a 'public open space', in particular on alternative financing mechanisms for remunerating collective services supplied by MFA.

B. A financing construction for MFA

Besides the presence of favourable regional conditions for MFA – like a broad societal support or the presence of valuable landscapes – alternative remuneration systems have to be constructed that make the provision of new rural (and often pure collective) services more attractive for farmers and rural landowners. As already mentioned before, an important aspect is that MFA has to prove its potential, not only at the local but also at the regional level, because it mainly depends on the capacity to create new markets in rural services through horizontal chain development or networks between different regional actors (farmers, rural entrepreneurs, rural dwellers, recreational

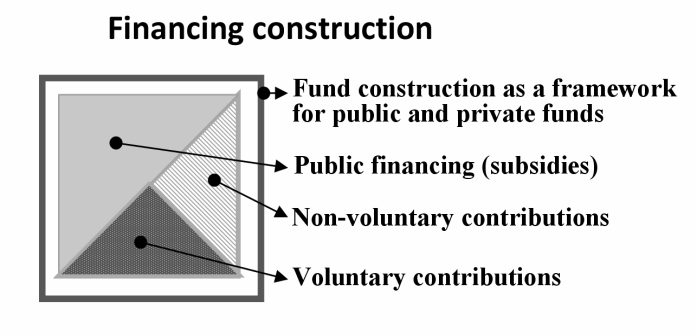


Fig. 1 A financing construction for (quasi-)collective services of MFA

consumers, etc.). (Oostindie et al., 2006) First, to develop a competitive MFA at this regional level, a good match between supply of and demand for new rural services is necessary. An effective coordination mechanism is therefore needed. Secondly, the remuneration of MFA should be predominantly driven by new regional markets in rural services, constructed by public and private actors. A combination of both private and public support in a financing construction should result in a more competitive and efficient remuneration for collective services.

The setting up of a *financing construction* (figure 1) aims at having more (financial) means and using them in a more efficient way. With respect to the first aspect, it is important that ,besides the *existing public financing channels* for nature and/or landscape management, private means can be used for co-financing collective services. Within these private means, a clear difference can be made between *voluntary* and *non-voluntary contributions*, but it is obvious that government has an important role in supporting both types of contributions. Even more efficiency can be achieved through the construction of *(regional, landscape or local) funds* in which both public and private means are gathered to remunerate for pure are quasi-collective services. The three

alternative financing mechanisms – through funds, through voluntary and through non-voluntary private contributions – are visualised in the figure and will be elaborated on in this paper.

The setting up of a financing construction is also a process regional actors (such as governments or regional institutions) have to invest a lot of time, energy and money in. It is recommended that, within this process, special attention is given to a coordination mechanism to tune the supply of and demand for collective services.

The three alternative financing mechanisms mentioned above also come into sight when listing different investment forms for collective rural services according to the motives for delivering them - ideological or economic - and to the effectiveness of the investments – high or low (Padt et al., 2002). Investment forms that are located high on the effectiveness axis can offer a lot of financial means for collective rural services, those scoring low on the same axis are attractive for other reasons. The motives for investing in collective services (horizontal axis) can be inspired more economically (left hand side) or more ideologically (right hand side).

The investment forms for collective rural services can be grouped in three clusters that correspond to the three alternative financing mechanisms (figure 2).

The first cluster contains investment forms that are based on voluntary contributions of private actors (individuals, companies, institutions or even farmers). The motives for these investments are mainly ideological – e.g. donation, sponsoring or membership of (nature or heritage) conservation agencies – but others are more economic – e.g. landscape arrangements or financial adoption of landscape elements.

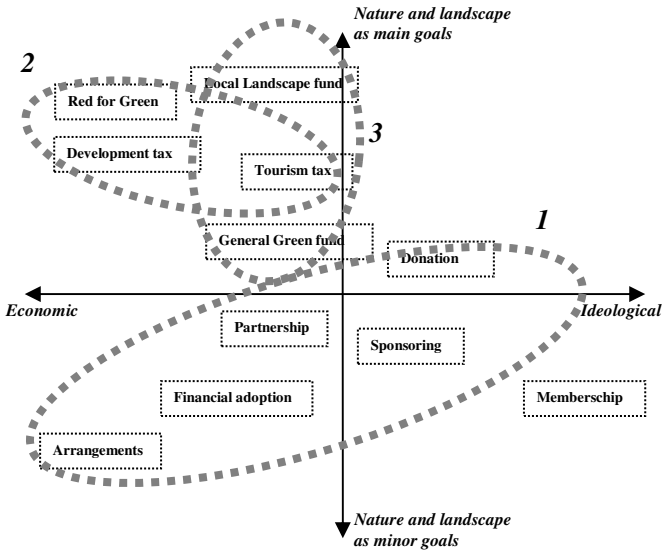


Fig. 2 Inventory of investment forms for quasi-collective services (Padt et al., 2002) and the designation of clusters.

The second cluster consists of investment forms that are induced by the indirect or generated private demand for collective services. 'Indirect' means that private actors pay back (by taxes) the added value they benefit from the presence of valuable landscapes or other rural goods. But the added value could also be 'generated' through government action when allowing new developments in the open space. In this case, there is an explicit agreement on the fact that those who take advantage of new developments have to invest in the quality (collective goods) of the surrounding open space. Both however deal with non-voluntary contributions and it is clear that societal support is therefore often lacking since most private actors tend to feel that 'public' goods must be provided (and managed) only by 'public' institutions.

In the third cluster, different forms of fund constructions are included. The financial means of a fund are generated from private resources, public resources or both. Payment occurs through interests or directly through invested capital. Depending on the goals of the fund, it is named 'landscape', 'regional' or 'green' fund. In contrast with the two former clusters, that refer to the original financial resources (regarding direct, indirect and generated demand), this cluster relates to the way in which collective services could be remunerated, namely through a fund.

One can conclude that the three clusters (or three financing mechanisms) cover almost all existing and potential investment forms. It is recommended that a regional policy, that aims at supporting MFA, simultaneously makes use of investment forms from the three clusters so the specific strengths of each of the clusters coincide in a well-performing remuneration system for (quasi-)collective services that is attractive for investors with different backgrounds. Investment forms within the first cluster are mostly inspired by social responsibility and contribute therefore to a broad support for MFA. The second cluster has the greatest potential in realising collective goods because this financing mechanism generates a lot of financial means. Since governments are primarily involved in acquiring those means (by taxes or by legislation), this implies that spatial planning procedures or procedures concerning EU conditions for government support can be restrictive elements in the development of this cluster. The third cluster takes advantage of the efficiency in remunerating new rural services through a fund. Nevertheless, the transaction costs of setting up a fund are considerable (Leneman et al., 2006). The financing construction to be constructed allows great flexibility. Depending on the regional conditions (rural or more urbanised) and the participating (public and private) actors, one or more clusters could be emphasised and, within each cluster, different investment forms should be possible.

C. Alternative roles of the government in the financing construction

With regard to the setting up of a financing construction, the supporting role of governments seems essential. The initial passive role, related to the public funding of collective services, is changing towards a more proactive and offensive role. Public actors must actively cooperate with private stakeholders in order to accomplish the three alternative financing mechanisms.

It is clear that governments have an important stimulating role within the first cluster. Fiscal stimuli, labels and/or quality marks can persuade private stakeholders to voluntarily invest in collective services. The governmental role in the second cluster is much more differentiated. On the one hand, taxes (ground taxes, tourism taxes) can be used for creaming off the added value (that is created by landscape and nature values). On the other hand, legislation (in spatial planning) can be changed to realise 'green' services for 'red' developments.

Also the construction process of a fund can be supported by (municipal or provincial) government. Private actors can be stimulated through fiscal stimuli, government itself can invest own financial means in the fund.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The overall relevance of the alternative story line of 'open space as public space', as elaborated on in this paper, is that it no longer attempts to legitimate the conservation of rural areas or open space fragments in an urbanising context from a merely and often no longer relevant (agricultural) economic or (nature) ecological point of view. It intrinsic strength is that it offers a really innovative complex of planning concepts that accommodates the socio-cultural positioning of open space in urbanising contexts … a story line that, until

now, has been underexposed in spatial planning practice.

A positive side effect of this socio-cultural planning discourse 'open space as public space' is that it opens perspectives to socially embed agricultural activity in the logics of contemporary network society. If society – citizens, politicians as well as farmers – increasingly perceives open space as public or shared space, the social basis for alternative financing systems to remunerate multifunctional agriculture for its services to society will undoubtedly grow. After all, the challenge to set up a regional fund perfectly fits the need for a strengthening of the social capital in the urbanising countryside.

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